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Current
Policy No. 437

American Role in NATO

November 30, 1982

United States Department of State
Bureau of Public Affairs
Washington, D.C.

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Following is a statement by Lawrence S. Eagleburger, Under Secretary for Political Affairs, before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, November 30, 1982.

I welcome the opportunity to testify today on the American role in NATO. Too often in foreign policy, as elsewhere, we take the most important things for granted. Too rarely do we examine the foundations of our security and our role in the world. This is an important time for the United States to examine and state clearly our policies toward European security.

- We are now almost 2 years into the Reagan Administration.
- In the Soviet Union, a new leadership has just taken up the reins of power. While it is unlikely that Mr. Andropov [Yuriy V. Andropov, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union] and his associates will veer far from existing Soviet policies, they are undoubtedly now studying the opportunities and constraints they face. They are sizing up our resolve and steadiness and, in particular, our ability to maintain a unified Western alliance.
- In Europe, we and our allies are succeeding in putting behind us contentious questions regarding the Siberian gas pipeline and are about to start an effort to shape a coordinated Western approach to East-West economic relations for the rest of this decade.

Against this backdrop we are now hearing voices in this country calling for a scaling down of the American role in NATO. Most disturbingly, we are facing specific proposals in the Senate and the House which would, among other things, reduce the level of U.S. forces in Europe and interfere with our ability to meet our commitment to modernize NATO's nuclear forces.

When such views surfaced in the past, the national commitment to a strong Atlantic alliance prevailed. Having fought two wars to defeat aggression in Europe, the American people know that our interests cannot be insulated from events across the Atlantic. We decided after the second of those wars—as we should decide again now—that alliance with the other Western democracies is vital to our nation's security and prosperity. If we have learned anything from the history of this century it is that we cannot retreat to a fortress America nor safely disengage from European affairs.

Europe has become more, not less, important for us over the three decades since the alliance was formed. The European and North American economies are now so tightly knit together that neither can grow without the other. The allied countries are our main export market. American direct investment in Europe is an important positive factor in our balance of payments and contributes heavily to the profitability of American business.

The United States and Western Europe are more than simply trading and political partners, however. Our security is unalterably linked with theirs. Western Europe is quite literally our

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first line of defense. It is the center of our global competition with the Soviet Union and by far the most alluring object of Soviet ambitions.

NATO's strength and cohesion have protected Western freedom and democracy and kept Europe peaceful for over three decades, despite a menacing Soviet military presence. If we sometimes forget that our European allies stand face to face with Soviet tanks and with Eastern totalitarianism, if the Soviet challenge sometimes seems distant to us, it is because NATO has been effective.

In recent years, Soviet military might has grown more rapidly than ever. Soviet foreign policy has become more assertive and aggressive. The invasion and occupation of Afghanistan is Moscow's first attempt since the end of the Second World War to expand by force the area under its direct control. The assault on the people of Poland shows that the Soviet leaders will not permit free institutions in countries where it has military dominion.

The new leadership in Moscow faces basic choices about the Soviet role in the world. If they see an America drawing inward, a demoralized Western alliance, and our European partners in doubt about the U.S. commitment, their incentive to act with greater restraint will be diminished.

The need for a strong Atlantic alliance based on unity of purpose and steady American leadership has never been more critical.

Proposed Senate Legislation

The Reagan Administration is particularly concerned, therefore, by the prospect of legislation that would cast doubt on the steadiness of the U.S. commitment to NATO. The current Senate defense appropriations bill, which contains provisions to cut back American participation in NATO defense programs, would, if passed, signal a broad U.S. retreat from its responsibilities and its leadership.

Passage of this legislation would be a fundamental departure from the historical bipartisan postwar U.S. approach to national security. Never has the American role in the defense of Western Europe been reduced through legislation. Never has the United States backed away from its NATO commitments. And never have the elected representatives of the American people voted not to stand by our allies and back up our defense commitments. Are we really ready now to take such a fateful step? Do we really want to greet the new Soviet leadership with a sharp deviation from the policies that have so successfully preserved Western security and American leadership in Europe?

The provisions that have been inserted in the Senate version of the proposed appropriations act that would be most damaging are:

- The reduction by 18,900 troops of the American force planned for the end of fiscal year 1983;
- The elimination of funds to procure heavy equipment for prestocking at two sites provided by Belgium and the Netherlands;
- The elimination of the American portion of the funding for 93,000 German reservists who will support our units in wartime under the host nation support program;
- Cuts in funding for the ground-launched cruise missile, which would force us to stretch our deployment schedules; and
- Restrictions on transatlantic defense cooperation and trade.

Let me emphasize one point right away. This Administration, like the Congress, is seriously concerned about the budget. We recognize that a sound economy is the necessary foundation for a successful foreign policy. But the provisions I have just outlined have almost nothing to do with budgetary austerity. The total saving contemplated by these anti-NATO proposals before the Senate is about $150 million, which is less than one-tenth of 1% of the total defense budget.

If the political consequences of these measures were as insignificant as the budgetary savings, I would not be here today. But the impact of these measures on our security would be out of all proportion to their budgetary significance.

Burdensharing Within NATO

I am aware that this legislation reflects a concern about the fairness of the distribution of defense burdens within the alliance. Like you, we want the allies to do more for the common defense. And it is true that U.S. defense spending is now growing faster than that of the allies. But let me remind you that we in the United States neglected military programs for nearly a generation and that only today are we repairing the resulting gaps in our forces. We must sprint now because we went so slowly for so many years.

In contrast, the allies have kept up a strikingly steady pace. During the 1970s, their defense spending rose at a rate of 2% per year in real terms. Our defense spending declined in real terms by 1% per year during the same period. If we had matched the allied growth rate during the 1970s we would not need to accelerate now. Conversely, had the allies failed to maintain their steady effort in those years—had their defense spending decisions been dominated by considerations of what some here in the United States now call "equity" rather than need—the alliance would not be as secure as it is today.

In any case, it would be a tragic mistake to allow concerns about burdensharing to prevent us from doing what is necessary for our own security. Following that policy would allow those whose defense performance is weakest to set the standard. We are fortunate that the allies did not adopt such an attitude during a time of less-than-adequate U.S. performance.

Effects on U.S. Security

After all the arguments and counter-arguments about burdensharing have been heard, we must, at the end of the day, ask ourselves one basic question: Will the United States be more or less secure if these provisions are enacted? I believe the answer is clearly "less secure." Let me outline the effects I foresee.

First, the American commitment to NATO would be placed in doubt. I do not see how the advocates of this legislation could dispute this or argue that causing doubts about our commitment would advance our interests. Nothing could weaken the alliance more than the perception in Europe that the United States is not determined to preserve European security. Our allies would take little comfort in the fact that the amount of money involved is small. They would see passage of these cuts as a statement of U.S. intentions; they would interpret it as the beginning of a more general American retreat from Europe.

The Soviet would undoubtedly try to exploit the inevitable doubts and fears of the Europeans. Dividing us from our allies and pushing us out of Europe are, of course, central goals of Soviet foreign policy. The Administration has, as you know, recently made progress in healing divisions and rebuilding consensus and confidence in the alliance. This legislation could undo what has been achieved.

Second, reductions, especially reductions in the number of American troops in Europe, would send the worst possible signal to European publics about the importance of a strong defense. NATO and U.S. leaders have been warning Europeans that the Soviet threat is growing. Reducing American forces or

abandoning planned improvements would make those warnings sound hollow and undermine European public and parliamentary support for defense expenditures.

Proponents of this legislation may claim that our doing less would jolt our allies into doing more. I see no basis for such wishful thinking. U.S. cuts would have the opposite effect. If we do less, the Europeans will do less, and we will all be less secure.

Third, these cuts, while small in dollar amounts, would hit priority, cost-effective programs especially hard. The proposed troop cuts could leave our combat forces undermanned or force the withdrawal of other essential units. Reductions in funding for prepositioning combat equipment and our share of the host nation support agreement would compound the difficulties and costs of wartime deployment.

We are constantly striving to make our dollars buy more fighting strength. These programs enhance our combat capacity by improving what is sometimes called our "teeth-to-tail" ratio. The proposed cuts would, therefore, reverse a major effort to improve our forces' effectiveness, while saving very little money. Moreover, they would not simply penalize our allies but our own forces by denying them the means to carry out their rapid reinforcement mission.

Fourth, these cuts would damage the very programs in which allied performance has been especially good. The Europeans have joined the host nation support and prepositioning programs with the clear and correct understanding that we would match or supplement them. If we now back down on our side of the bargain, we will not only lose the benefits of these programs but will undermine our credibility for the development of any future cooperative efforts.

In 1978 at a summit meeting in Washington, alliance leaders agreed to a long-term program providing, among other things, for rapid U.S. wartime reinforcement of Europe. Since then, our allies have fulfilled their commitment. For example, Belgium and the Netherlands, both small and densely populated countries, have gone to considerable effort and expense to obtain the land required to store prepositioned U.S. equipment. The Federal Republic of Germany has allocated half the funds for 93,000 additional German reservists to support U.S. deployments. The proposed appropriations bill would threaten both of these programs. Is this a sensible way to respond when the allies have done just what we proposed they do?

If restrictions on our contributions to the long-term defense program stand, the entire program will atrophy. We will turn a notable success into failure. We will cancel out much of what we and the allies have already achieved—and paid for.

Last June in Bonn, President Reagan and his allied counterparts committed themselves in a special summit charter to specific plans for improving NATO's conventional capabilities. This charter called for the achievement of demanding force goals and identified priority programs. I cannot now guarantee that this charter will be implemented in every detail, though we will work to that end. But I can say with absolute confidence that if these cuts are legislated that charter will not be translated into concrete improvements.

Let me restate unequivocally our agreement that the allies need to do more. This Administration has made that clear at every opportunity, here and abroad, and is working to produce a greater allied contribution to our common defense effort.

A cut in funding for the ground-launched cruise missile and the deletion of funds for the deployment of the Pershing II missile, which has been voted in the House, would dash our hopes for a negotiated solution to the problem posed by the Soviet SS-20 intermediate-range nuclear missiles. In the INF [intermediate-range nuclear forces] talks in Geneva, we have proposed a treaty that would ban this whole class of Soviet and U.S. intermediate-range nuclear missiles. But only if we and our allies show that we are resolved to deploy U.S. missiles in Europe can we get the Soviets to negotiate seriously.

The advocates of this legislation owe it to us all to explain how it would help arms control and thus contribute to reduction of the threat. Is there any evidence that unilateral limits and cuts can have anything other than a destructive effect on negotiated arms control? Should we not be more concerned about reducing the threat than about reducing our ability to counter it?

The need for a strong Atlantic alliance based on unity of purpose and steady American leadership has never been more critical.

Our attempts to foster better coordination of U.S. and European defense spending and to have our allies take greater responsibility for our common defense are bearing fruit. But only if we ourselves keep the commitments that we have made can we count on the allies to improve their performance.

Finally, a legislated, unilateral U.S. pullback from our military commitments to NATO would damage prospects for arms control. Unilateral U.S. troop withdrawals would remove any incentive for the Soviets to agree to mutual reductions that would lower the threat and ease the military confrontation in the heart of Europe. At the MBFR [mutual and balanced force reductions] talks in Vienna we are seeking to negotiate the new Western draft treaty put forward by the President last spring. That treaty would correct the present imbalance between Soviet and Western forces in Central Europe through significant, verifiable reductions to equal levels.

Conclusion

Let me conclude with a few basic points. The Atlantic alliance has provided well for Western security for 30 years. That alliance is built upon the forces that we and our allies have deployed in Europe and the conviction that the United States is fully committed to the defense of Europe. When those forces and that conviction are strong, deterrence in Europe is sturdy and we are secure. We weaken them at our peril. The world will be dangerous enough in this decade. It is not in our interest to tamper with North Atlantic security. ■

Published by the United States Department of State · Bureau of Public Affairs
Office of Public Communication · Editorial Division · Washington, D.C. · December 1982
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